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ABSTRACT

The communication technologies of television and common carriers have an important correlativity to message formation, due to their ability to bring the public information at lightning speed. Historicity, the science of writing history, can be used by the television critic in order to critique national and international broadcasting. Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics worldwide, like the rest of humanity, are attempting to improve their lives. Mass communication has not kept pace with the new reality of these people: their needs are not met. The United Nations (UN) Summit is an important communication event; this UN effort might inspire the mass media to bring more relevant information. Unfortunately, the masses trust television, but they are not equipped to interpret it. Course work in American colleges and universities is needed to train critics in historicity and other stylology. When students who are properly trained work in the field, valuable, correct feedback can be given to government and to private and public groups involved in message formation. Critics can alert the audience to discrepancies in the reportage of broadcasting through the use of historicity and other stylology. Broadcasting can be made to change its course in order to become more meaningful to the world it serves. International scholars can also use historicity when using television as a source to adequately abstract television's reality. (fifteen references are attached.) (MG)

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Historicity, The Television Critic, and The Third World Scholar

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Eastern Illinois University

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Dedication:

To Maggie

Abstract

Thesis:

The science of writing history, historicity, can be used by television critics in order to better comprehend, critique, and assess the essence of what passes for international broadcasting, specifically television news; crisis situations that impinge on all of society are mentioned as "news focus around the world" that bring us closer together; and, state-of-the-art communication technology is presented here as an important correlativity to TV criticism.

Summary:

The communication technologies of television and common carriers have an important correlativity to message formation, due to their ability to bring us information at lightning speed. Historicity, the science of writing history, can be used by the TV critic in order to critique national and international broadcasting. International scholars will benefit by using this stylology, because, television is now regarded as a legitimate source of information.

Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics worldwide, like the rest of humanity, are attempting to improve their lives. Mass communication, however, has not kept pace with the new reality of these people: Their needs are not met. The UN Summit, on behalf of the world's children, is an important communication event; and, this UN effort might inspire the

mass media to bring us more relevant information, instead of the usual banal offerings.

Unfortunately, the masses trust TV, but they are not equipped to interpret it. Professionals in the field also lack the skills to critique TV, as demonstrated by their lack of attention to the "use" of "formal" criteria. Course work in American colleges and universities is needed to train critics in historicity and other stylology. When students, properly trained, work in the field, valuable, correct feedback can be given to government, private, and public groups involved in message formation.

Conclusions:

The interaction between properly trained critics and professional newscasters and their reporters will result in better television. Society is the beneficiary. The best citizenry is a correctly informed one. Critics can alert us to discrepancies in the reportage of broadcasting through the use of "historicity" and other stylology. Broadcasting can be made to change its course in order to become more meaningful to the world it serves. Finally, international scholars can also use "historicity" when using TV as a source to adequately abstract television's reality.

This material is currently being used by the Speech Communication Department at Eastern Illinois University in the graduate course entitled SPC 5330: Media Criticism and in both graduate and undergraduate seminars in international broadcasting.

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Thesis:

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(Text)

Television, Communication Technology, and Information:

Today, a large part of the world is bonded together by the need to know information, as quickly and as accurately as possible. This bonding is enhanced by the continual improvement of television and communication technology, with its ability to reach mass audiences around the world, at lightning speed; moreover, many more people today, worldwide, have television in their homes, or have access to television receivers.

Cable TV, Telephoney, Cellular Radio, and Fiber Optics:

Most recently in the US, Cable TV is replacing the old copper wiring, in the coaxial cable, with new fiber optic wiring. The fiber optic, the size of a human hair, but hollow on the inside to accommodate lasers, has already been in use for some time now by the telephone industry; in addition, the young cellular radio industry now boasts that

three out of four Americans are living in cellular radio areas. Although the analogue signal will only permit some 1500 subscribers to use the new technology, mostly business firms residing within the area of a small city, switching to a digital signal will greatly increase cellular's capacity, thus, allowing for more customer use by the regular land phone user.

Cellular radio is now in Canada, Mexico, and in many European countries. England seems to have the lead in that part of the world. Before the year 2000, no doubt, cellular radios will be commonplace in most developed countries and in some developing nations.

Out of Harm's Way Toward a Safer World

The need to know by humans, then, and the ability to suffice that need by television and other modern communication technology, not to mention the existing mass media, i. e., radio, film, newspapers, magazines, and books, make the decades ahead appear more stable; because, an informed government and citizenry, with lead time provided by these communication technologies, can adequately deal with potential catastrophes. Nevertheless, in the short term at least, we can count on a number of crises taking place on our planet earth!

The Middle East and Europe:

The United Nations and America against Iraq:

At this writing, the United States, its allies, and the world at large, are concerned that the leadership in

Iraq will not heed the warnings made by the United Nations. The UN has made it crystal clear that Iraq's annexation of Kuwait is illegal and that the Kuwaiti government should be restored immediately. The idea of war is as old as mankind; nevertheless, despite the current problems in the Middle East, there exists ample evidence that Europe, both East and West, is entering an exciting period in its history that may bring it a lasting peace, in addition to an improved economy throughout the region. Anything, of course, is possible. All of the players, the European nations, need to work out as best they can their own destinies, but this time in concert with one another. On the other hand, news about the Middle East keeps us "glued" to our TV sets. Through it all, the Palestinian issue seems to have been put on the back burner, or forgotten completely. That is the nature of the evening news: If it's not "red hot" it's "too cold to serve."

Palestinians:

In time, hopefully, a peace can be worked out for the Middle East. Peace cannot take place, however, without making room for everyone at the inn, i. e., the Palestinians. This rhetoric is not empty; instead, it simply echoes what most people already know and are now willing to say aloud. When will the Palestinians find a home (Abourezk, J. G., Advise and Dissent, 1989)? Israel's security, of course, is not to be compromised!

The Children of the Third World:

Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines, around the country are carrying stories about the telegenic Children's Summit at the United Nations that began September 30, 1990. Unfortunately, the United States seems to be left "out in the cold," because the White House refuses to sign what 109 nations have signed: the UN convention on the rights of children. It turns out the document conflicts with individual state laws especially as they relate to "when the life of a child begins and is contrary to some state laws because it prohibits certain criminal punishment, including the death penalty, for children under age 18" (McNulty, T. J. September 30, 1990, Chicago Tribune, Section 1, p. 4).

Africans and African-Americans:

If the poor get poorer in a rich country such as ours, what about the poor of the world? Is their lot getting any better? The political reality of the African nations is that, despite recent efforts to assist countries, e. g., Ethiopia, the tide of poverty has not significantly changed. One reason is that the struggle for power in that country has resulted in "people abuse" as food is used to coerce its citizens into submission.

Food has become one of America's most powerful commodities, in the sense that we have one of the lowest per capita involvement in the production of food and we far surpass the quantity needed to feed our own. In the past decade the US has continually supplied nations, e. g., the

USSR with grain shipments. If countries like the US can meet the needs of a variety of nations, why is it that we cannot meet the needs of our poor; not just with food, but with a decent wage above the poverty line. The fact of the matter is that the rich in America are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. Note the following according to the US Census Bureau:

1. 31.5 million Americans have incomes below the government's official poverty level of $12,675 for a family of four (12.8% of the US population)

2. One-fifth of all children under 18 are classified as poor, but

3. 50% of all BLACK children under age 6 are living in poverty!

4. The Reagan--Bush economic expansion of the 1980s that promised to eradicate poverty proved two things:

   A. the longest economic expansion in history could be achieved, while

   B. the problems of poverty and income distribution could not, or would not, be resolved.

("The Poor Get Poorer," Septemher 30, 1990, St. Louis Post Dispatch, p. 2B).

Asians:

Are Asians and Asian-Americans faring better than their Black and Hispanic counterparts worldwide? "Percentage-wise," nearly one out of two people on earth is Asian. Countries such as China and India are struggling to

improve their economy. Population control is imperative if they wish to improve their condition. Thus far, China has managed to control their population better than has India; however, there have been charges of infanticide leveled against China. Meanwhile, The Christian Science Monitor Monthly reports "Long eclipsed by China and Japan, India has quietly become a major high-tech and military force" (Challaney, B., "Passage to Power," pp. 24-32). Nevertheless, India according to CNN is abusing their young brides. Young female children are treated with less respect than is accorded their male counterparts (CNN's Wide World Report, September 30, 1990).

Hispanics and Hispanic-Americans:

If Spain and Portugal are now full partners in the European Community and enjoying new prosperity in the midst of peace along with fellow EC nations, what about their former colonies? Angola is slowly working out its problems now that the armies of Cuba and those supported by South Africa and Western sympathizers have left. We hear less and less, however, about the Spanish Sahara; evidently, it is not important enough to make the daily newspapers and broadcasting in the US.

Moving to our hemisphere, we might also say that events in the Middle East have upstaged a decade or more of news from Central America. Now that Panama and Nicaragua no longer pose a threat--not that they ever really did--we can concentrate on a new dialogue with the major Latin American

players, and, thus, open the door to an economic alliance with our neighbors to the south: Free trade agreements!

Peace does not seem to be a problem in this part of the world. Eight Latin nations have replaced dictaduras, or military led governments with civilian rule. The question is "does peace and improved economy enhance the chances for a higher standard of living by all Latins?" The answer, of course, is not necessarily so. What was stated earlier concerning the Reagan-Bush administration can also be applied to the Latin paradigm.

The comparison is made simply to point out that when nations improve their economies in times of peace, we might expect the benefits to reach the entire population. Latin Americans by comparison, however, lag so far behind us that any improvement made by their governments is most assuredly apt to benefit them. The middle class in most South American countries is far smaller than ours.

The case of Peru serves as a microcosm for many third world countries. Hernando de Soto's work best exemplifies what people can do on their own when the government "butts out" (The Other Path, 1989). Illegal businesses, that compete alongside legal businesses, comprise billions of dollars of assets and provide more than half of the many services that benefit Peruvians. In time illegal businesses become certified by the state: capitalism in its purest form! The Peruvian government, as a result, increases its GNP.

Closer to home, Hispanic-Americans will soon overtake Black Americans as the largest minority. Spanish is now the second language in the US. Crime in the major American cities, however, affect Hispanics, as well as Blacks, low-income Whites, and Asians. East Los Angeles has long been the home of gangs who originally existed to protect their families and homes. Today they are, of course, extensions of organized crime. The National Rifle Association continues its lobby to provide us with as many weapons as we please; and, Cuban Americans in Miami now carry substantial weapons to protect themselves in a hostile environment. Many of them, no doubt, are very young (Adler, J., et al, September 24, 1990, p. 83).

Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics worldwide, like the rest of humanity, are attempting to improve their lots in life. Mass communication, nevertheless, has not kept pace with the real needs of these people. The nature of the "beast" has been to present information that reflects the concerns of multi-national corporations over the humanitarian needs of people in the third world. A steady diet of TV viewing, oftentimes, is a banal installment by the networks of familial situation comedies, while the rest of the world cries. 40,000 children die everyday (Freivogel, M. W., "Summit..." September 30, 1990, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, p. 1A).

Still, ASIAN (Alliance of South East Asian Nations) has demonstrated, all too well, that once-traditional third

world countries can surmount the holocaust of war, WWII, and rise to challenge the rest of the world with economic might. These nations, Japan and the Four Little Dragons: Taiwan, Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore, are now among the planet's most prosperous people. Hopefully, they will do their share to improve living conditions for the children of the world. In this regard, communication plays an important role.

The Eyes and Ears of the Planet:

Television, in the midst of everything that is happening on the planet, remains the "eyes" and "ears" of the world. The monitor of TV relates what the camera sees and hears, as it were. Nevertheless, what television presents to its viewers oftentimes is a specific point of view. This view, of course, is the director's and editor's concept and final statement arrived at individually, or as a team. Afterwards, the viewers are asked to make decisions about the trustworthiness and accuracy of the medium, with little or no knowledge about the issues or matters brought before them. Obviously, specialists in the fields of these issues or matters discussed can make more intelligent judgments vis-a-vis the rightness or wrongness of a statement.

For the most part, though, television directors and editors have a free reign in the "who," "what," and "how" information is structured for the American public, as long as they do not upset the producers, who in turn are responsible to the Federal Communications Commission (F.C.C.>.

The F.C.C. and Deregulation:

The period of deregulation, mostly under the Reagan Administration, saw then F.C.C. Commissioner Mark Fowler support broadcasters over government bureaucracy, e. g., rules such as the "Fairness Doctrine" disappeared (Head, S., and Sterling, C.). Other F.C.C. Commissioners in the past such as Newton Minnow felt that the public had to be protected from broadcasting's capriciousness and lack of concern. The "public interest, convenience, and necessity" criterion, that loosely translated means "in the public's welfare," then, was instituted in the 1934 Federal Communications Act in order to enforce the idea that the airways belong to the people and that broadcasters, moreover, have a responsibility to broadcast in favor of the public's concern. This fundamental philosophy remains the cornerstone of American broadcasting. Mark Fowler was not successful in transferring this ownership to broadcasters.

Broadcasters, then, must provide quality programming that is relevant to the culture of the people. This idea has further been enforced in numerous instances where minorities have complained that programming in their area of the country did not relate to them as a group. As a result of this criterion, therefore, broadcasting since 1934 has endeavored to bring relevant "high quality" programming to all of its listeners and viewers; and, this in turn has earned it the respect of most Americans. The same might be said of our external broadcasting services, especially that

of the Voice of America, referred to affectionately, by Director Richard Carlson and his very able staff, simply as the "Voice."

After all, television year after year, according to A. C. Nielsen (Chicago), is the most trusted medium by American consumers. Who is to say whether or not the F.C.C.'s leadership, over the past decades, does not deserve a great deal of credit for TV's high credibility? Here is where the television critic can fulfill the important task of determining for the uninformed where television has succeeded and where television has failed in its responsibility to the public: Who is responsible for the quality of television? Is it the government, the producers, or the public? Professional critics trained in historicity, with a strong liberal arts background, including course work in ethics, are needed to advise government, TV producers, and the citizenry, because they are all affected.

The TV Critic's Responsibility:

How should the critic proceed? Perhaps the most difficult task a human being is called upon to do, is to evaluate. Yet, each waking hour of the day people make many decisions based on what television has taught them. And yes, once again, it is precisely television's high credibility that in turn draws the masses. If these two propositions were not true, then television"s advertisers would send the bulk of their money elsewhere, to other media. No, advertising on television is alive and well and dollar

for dollar, according to mass communication professors Melvin Defluer and Everette Dennis, television is by far the best investment (Understanding Mass Communication).

The Ratings Game and the need to Survive:

The problem with television is that ratings become paramount for the capitalist. This case is true here in America as in the NTSC nations (those nations whose television technology is based on ours: **National Television Systems Committee**). The higher the ratings the more revenue a given network or station can charge for television's precious time. We have already passed the 1 million dollar-per-commercial-minute (dpcm). Events like the "Super Bowl" and the "World Series" become the pace-setters in breaking the dpcm record. Prime-time in the evening hours, of course, garners the greatest amount of money for the various networks and local stations. The name of the game, therefore, is money!

Mass communicologists, like economists, et al., however, recognize that we all have to earn a living by competing in a capitalistic society. Advertising, thus, is here to stay. Considering the foregoing, the TV critic by and large reconciles television's economic saliency. The features that contribute to television's survival, then, are of little concern to most critics of the medium, who prefer instead to concentrate on the more aesthetic aspects produced by the "flow and glow" of TV.

The Money Machine versus the Content of TV:

The TV critic, once again, sees economics as the concern of the capitalist and, therefore, dismisses it outright! But, content, the content of television, that is a thing apart: Programming not advertising. If critics do not want to deal with critiquing advertising, they can at least do a good job critiquing the regular programming.

Admitting the above, how does the critic approach the profession? If we ask the critic what type of criticism he or she applies to the medium, we are apt to come away with little more than a "subjective" view on the part of the critic: usually a personal preference; or, a personal bias.

One of the reasons for this dilemma is that most universities do not offer course work in television criticism. (Simply contact the nearest university, or several universities to see if this is not the case.) When the course is offered, quite often it is not offered on a regular basis. Insufficiency, then, becomes the norm. At the very least, let us remedy this condition by offering proper and sufficient course work, including television criticism classes that incorporate "historicity" so that educated critics can then perform the important task of critiquing television. The importance of putting subjectivity aside, in favor of utilizing real criteria, cannot be over-emphasized.

Historicity, the Critic's Friend:

When it comes to critiquing television news, documentaries, features, or historical profiles, at the national or international level, no present style of criticism has more advantages for the TV critic than does "historicity." Historicity, "the science of writing history," prepares the TV critic by teaching her/him how to apply the criteria used "to critique history" "to critique television"; present and future generations can thus learn the truth about our universe.

Historicity, however, need not replace the use of statistics. The latter can still be used to yield information where historicity may be found wanting due to its qualitative nature. That is not at issue here. The qualitative historical stylology (historicity) that asks the critic "to interpret information based on facts" and that can be recognized by the critic's "use of interrogative pronouns," that is what is demanded.

Dominic LaCapra, Cornell University, maintains that it is high time scholars from throughout academia come together to discuss historicity, the science of writing history (History and Criticism, 1985). Likewise, G. Kitson Clark, Cambridge University, states that the time has come to look at what "passes" for history, because much of what passes would never have passed if it were left up to the scrutiny of the town lawyer (The Critical Historian, 1967).

Therefore, let the discussion, the colloquium,

begin! Let us challenge our colleagues in our colleges and universities to create criticism-related course work. Let us challenge each other to use "historicity" in the present as we have used "statistics" in the past. Both can benefit the TV critic. And when we see television news, of a historical nature, that we know to be false, we can all challenge the integrity of the presenters. In this fashion, mis-information and dis-information is corrected.

History can be and should be a correct assessment of what happened, is happening, and what might happen. Yes, proper historicity is the act of interpreting facts correctly. As Clark points out in his book The Critical Historian, "facts are not history," instead, "history rests on facts (1967)."

The International Scholar/The Latinamericanist:

The international scholar will benefit from using the TV critic's historical style in critiquing television, because much of what we are eager to discover is presented on television long before it ever appears in print. We can make television more accountable to the scholar by demanding greater scrutiny of stories, etc., on the part of TV reporters and announcers. The international scholar, moreover, usually possesses a higher or greater degree of preparation in the areas of history, political-economy, and sociology at the international level, than is usually the case with the average news disseminator. The Latinamericanists, as international scholars, can no longer

avoid the content of television simply because the print media appears more academic. Television carries history, quickly and efficiently.

Through Whose Eyeglasses?:

An eclectic approach to critiquing television is also possible (Oseguera, Critiquing TV/TBF, 1990). As Marshall McLuhan said some years ago, we all see the world through our own set of eyeglasses (The Medium is the Massage, 1967). McLuhan, of course, was speaking of television viewing. And, it is thus with TV. We each bring our experiences and expertise to the viewing of TV. The more scholars learn about the nature and purpose of TV, and the more we learn to differentiate the lapidary from the liminal, i. e., the differentiation of television's content, the more accurate will be our evaluation of television.

With proper feedback to those concerned, the producers, the government, and the people, the real potential of television can be tapped; the ability to tell stories honestly and sincerely will carry the day.

Summary:

The communication technologies of television and common carriers have an important correlativity to message formation, due to their ability to bring us information at lightning speed. We are thus placed out of harm's way. However, historicity, television criticism, and international broadcasting, when brought together as: the science of writing history, by the TV critic, in order to critique

international broadcasting, can be useful when correctly employed. International scholars might choose this style as an alternative to quantitative style, statistics, in order to better "interpret" what information passes for history on television. Television, moreover, should now be regarded as a research source, because it brings us information, live, from around the world: instantly.

Blacks, Asians, and Hispanics worldwide, like the rest of humanity, are attempting to improve their lots in life. Mass communication, nevertheless, has not kept pace with the real needs of these people. Banal network TV installments still take precedence over third world concerns. The UN Summit, on behalf of the children of the world, is an important communication event. Hopefully, ASEAN, once developing nations themselves, can by their example and by their assistance join the effort to help children throughout the world.

Unfortunately, the masses, by and large, seem to trust television, but are not academically equipped to interpret television's messages scientifically: using "historicity." Many professionals in the industry, reporters and announcers, also lack training in historicity and television criticism, as do members of government; therefore, colleges and universities can and should provide course work that enhances television criticism. Important feedback will thus be provided to society determining the medium of television's honesty and sincerity, in its effort to

formulate television news, as well as, the additional programming genres. Integrity can be enhanced.

Conclusion:

We can no longer tolerate a condition where "popular" critics tell us what is "right" or "wrong" with television, because they lack the proper education: course work in TV criticism that includes knowledge of historicity and its application to critiquing TV. Simple whimsical analysis with disregard for "specific" criteria will not pass muster. Instead, we must insist on higher ground! Preparing critics, in the "formal" sense, with the proper tools of TV criticism, using historicity, statistics when appropriate, and other stylology, are what is needed to properly interact with TV.

The interaction between properly trained critics and professional newscasters and their reporters will result in better television. "Mis-information" and "dis-information" on the part of both announcer and critic can only exacerbate the climate of television.

Finally, when individuals are properly educated and perform in the same fashion, all of society gains from the act. The best citizenry, after all, is a correctly informed one. We cannot be deceived, nor can we be incorrectly informed when television critics, formerly trained in their craft, alert us to discrepancies in the reportage of national and international broadcasting.

When the time arrives that peace and prosperity are

commonplace on our planet, where the children of the world can play in the full realization that the future is really theirs, it will be because broadcasting changed its course to more accurately and effectively present the world to the world as it really is: one ready to be born.

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